

TESTIMONY OF DEB HILL, CHAIR, COCONINO COUNTY BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS

On H.R. 5751, the Walnut Canyon Study Act of 2008
House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
July 10, 2008

Chairman Grijalva and members of the House National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee, as Chair of the Coconino County Board of Supervisors, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on H.R. 5751, the Walnut Canyon Study Act of 2008. Coconino County would like to extend our gratitude to Chairman Grijalva, the Committee and Congressman Ed Pastor, for their continued effort to move the Walnut Canyon Study Act forward.

On behalf of Coconino County and the Flagstaff Community, I would like to relay our strong support for the Walnut Canyon Study Act. H.R. 5751 will assist with continued planning efforts in Coconino County and the area surrounding the Walnut Canyon National Monument. We cannot overstate the importance to the Flagstaff community of proper planning in the area of this unique monument.

H.R. 5751, the Walnut Canyon Study Act, authorizes the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to jointly conduct a study of certain land adjacent to the Walnut Canyon National Monument to evaluate the significance of the public uses and resource values of land and to make a recommendation for the future management of the area. The land referred to as the Study Area in the legislation is comprised of approximately 31,000 acres and includes Federal land, Arizona State Trust land, private land (which will not be affected) and land within the Walnut Canyon National Monument, managed by the National Park Service. All other non-private land within the

study area is managed by the United States Forest Service or the Arizona State Land Department.

The Study Area surrounding the Walnut Canyon National Monument contains important natural habitats, abundant and diverse flora and fauna, and truly unique archeological, topographical, scenic and sacred grounds full of tradition and culture. The distribution, diversity and location of historic sites are unique and include the only cliff dwelling architecture of the Northern Sinagua Native American culture. Many contemporary tribes look at this area as the home of their ancestors. The natural and cultural resources within the Monument are known to be significant to these native tribes, as evidenced by oral history, continuing practices and the archeological record. In addition, land under management by the United States Forest Service enjoys many valued public uses.

Due to widespread public interest and the diverse groups with vested interests in the land surrounding the Walnut Canyon National Monument, on February 12, 2002, Coconino County and the City of Flagstaff conducted a joint meeting to discuss this issue. A “staff group” was created and included staff from the National Park Service, the United States Forest Service, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the City of Flagstaff and Coconino County.

Three public input meetings were scheduled in 2002 to provide the public with agency introductions, resource information, known land uses, alternative land designations and options. Upon conclusion of the meetings there was a consensus that preservation within the Study Area was in the public interest and current uses in the area

should be retained. However, an agreement was not reached on which agency is best to manage this property and what the final boundary should look like.

Concurrently, a phone survey was conducted including residents of the incorporated area of Flagstaff, as well as unincorporated areas of Coconino County including Kachina, Mountaineer, Parks, Ft. Valley and Doney Park. The results were remarkably similar to those of the public input meetings with the vast majority of the participants supporting continued preservation and a continuation of current uses. In addition, hundreds of letters and calls from citizens were received for consideration.

This public process, along with the team efforts of the staff group, resulted in a joint resolution by the Coconino County Board of Supervisors and the Flagstaff City Council on December 17, 2002. This resolution is a result of the public's desire obtained through an open process with citizen, federal, state and local participation to determine the best manner in which to protect these lands and resources in perpetuity, while allowing the continuation of current uses.

The study authorized by H.R. 5751 will evaluate the significance of the public values and resources of the Study Area as pertaining to the management objectives of the Forest Service and the National Park Service, opportunities for maintaining existing public uses and recommend a range of options for best managing and conserving the same.

Ultimately, upon completion of the Study by an experienced third party consultant, it is envisioned recommendations will be made through collaboration between the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Forest Supervisor of the

Coconino National Forest, the Superintendent of the Flagstaff Area National Monuments, the Flagstaff City Council and the Coconino County Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, on behalf of the Flagstaff Community and the citizens of Coconino County, thank you for your consideration of the Walnut Canyon Study Act of 2008. We look forward to your support for this important legislation.